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Projects sought for Iowa's Great Places initiative

108 By BOB
VAN ENKENVOORT
Messenger editor

Gov. Tom Vilsack wants to create more great places in Iowa.

And he wants them fast.

Vilsack created the Great Places initiative earlier this year to help spur innovative projects across the state that spur economic development and improve quality of life.

The concept emerged through the state's new purchasing results budget process. It is designed to bring together the resources of state government to build capacity in communities, regions, neighborhoods or districts to cultivate the

unique and authentic qualities that make each place special.

Anita Walker, state Cultural Affairs Department director, said there are no set parameters for the projects.

However, she said, the projects must:

- have broad community support;
- ideally enhance a natural asset, a main street or an urban area; and
- be able to show quick re-

sults.

"It isn't about reinventing Iowa. It's about first recognizing what we've got," Walker said.

Walker said local groups are asked to brainstorm and submit projects for the program. Groups interested in submitting a proposal are encouraged to at-

tend one of the forums held in late May and early June to find out more about the program.

"It's up to

the community to know what's special," Walker said, "and that's where it

starts."

A key component of the program, Walker said, is to simplify working with the maze of state bureaucracy to take the project proposals from idea to reality.

"Rather than building a dream piecemeal, we will provide a one-stop shop."

Approved plans will be submitted to the state, and various state entities will work together on that level to put together a plan that uses expertise and other available resources of the in-

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Great places

Regional forums for Gov. Tom Vilsack's Great Places initiative are scheduled for:

- May 17, Clear Lake
- May 18, Spencer
- May 19, Council Bluffs
- May 24, Pella
- May 25, Cedar Falls
- May 26, Muscatine
- June 1, Cedar Rapids
- June 2, Des Moines

■ The state's Great Places team — made up of representatives from 18 state agencies — will receive invitations by July 1 from places that want to pursue the initiative.

■ Throughout July and August, Great Places "coaches" will work with places to get their offers ready for presentation in September.

■ By Oct. 1, a Citizen Advisory Council, appointed by Gov. Tom Vilsack, will select three projects to participate in a pilot program.



Gov. Tom
Vilsack



Anita
Walker



Places

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dividual state departments.

"We want to bring together the capacity that already exists in state government," Walker said. "When we target projects and focus our efforts, it can have a real impact."

State officials will also work with local officials to see what can be done on that level to help make the projects a reality.

Projects will be presented this summer. Three will be selected for the pilot program.